

REPORT

Climate Action, Planning and Development

To: Mayor Johnstone and Members of Council
Date: January 8, 2024
From: Serena Trachta, Acting Director,
Climate Action Planning and Development
File: Doc#2422290
Item #: 2024-11
Subject: Outcomes from Attending the United Nations Conference on Climate Change (COP28)

RECOMMENDATION

THAT Council receive this report for information.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with a summary of the learnings and outcomes, which will be applied to the Climate Action work portfolio, from having attended the United Nations Conference on Climate Change (UNCCC) in Dubai, also known as COP28. This report provides a cross-section of the experience, but is not an exhaustive narrative of the breadth of collaboration, connection and learnings coming out of having attended this event.

SUMMARY

From December 1st – December 6th, 2023 the City of New Westminster was invited to participate in the historic, first ever, [Local Climate Action Summit](#) as part of the United Nations Conference on Climate Change (COP28). This global summit of local leaders was convened and coordinated by international organizations focused on local climate action (i.e. [ICLEI](#), [C40 Cities](#), [Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy](#), and many others).

Cities are on the frontlines of climate change and are not only able to build and design climate resilient futures, with the understanding of local needs, but are also able to work directly with citizens to collaborate, inspire and accelerate climate mitigation and

adaptation. This world stage raises the voice of cities to strengthen multilevel dialogue and ensure that national and international action is addressing local needs experienced on the ground in cities.

Throughout the conference, there were a variety of presentations, ministerial briefings, demonstrations, solutions focused workshops, and discussions on real-world city-level successes and challenges as they relate to implementing climate change mitigation, adaptation and resilience strategies. There were also opportunities for personal interaction with youth, industry, research organizations and city leaders from across the world (including Canada). These interactions open the door to ongoing learning as we accelerate implementing the City's climate action plans on topics such as:

- Climate Action Mitigation and Adaptation
- Electrical Grid Infrastructure, Generation and Smart Cities
- Youth Empowerment

Next steps will incorporate learnings and takeaways from the conference into the delivery of the Climate Action Team workplan.

BACKGROUND

From December 1st – December 6th, 2023 the City of New Westminster was invited to participate in the historic, first ever, *Local Climate Action Summit* as part of the United Nations Conference on Climate Change (COP28). This global summit of local leaders was convened and coordinated by international organizations focused on local climate action (i.e. [ICLEI](#), [C40 Cities](#), [Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy](#), and many others).

Since the adoption of the [Paris Agreement](#) on climate change at [COP21](#) in 2015, subsequent conferences have revolved around implementing its key goal: halt global average temperature rise to well below 2°C and pursue efforts to limit the rise to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. COP28 represents a turning point, where countries not only agree and show 'WHAT' stronger climate actions will be taken, but show 'HOW' to deliver them. Measuring the progress towards achieving the Paris goals on mitigation, adaptation and climate finance and adapting existing plans is a key part of the puzzle, and this is why COP28 assumes more significance than prior conferences.

As part of the ongoing process of measuring progress on the Paris Agreement, a global stocktake is required to take place every 5 years, and the first-ever stocktake has concluded and was prepared for reporting on at COP28. The global stocktake is the process of taking an inventory to report on progress. It means looking at everything related to where the world stands on climate action and support, identifying the gaps, and working together to chart a better course forward to accelerate climate action.

Including local leaders in the proceedings provides recognition of the critical role they play in reducing emissions, addressing climate risk, and supercharging national efforts

to move further and faster on climate action. Cities are on the frontlines of climate change and are not only able to build and design climate resilient futures, with the understanding of local needs, but are also able to work directly with citizens to collaborate, inspire and accelerate climate mitigation and adaptation. This world stage raises the voice of cities to strengthen multilevel dialogue and ensure that national and international action is addressing local needs experienced on the ground in cities, every single day.

DISCUSSION

With the outcomes of the first ever global stocktake, it has been made clear that, if the pace of change continues at the rate it has over the past 5 years, the world is not on a trajectory to meet the commitments of the Paris Agreement and will not keep global warming to a limit of 1.5°C above pre-industrial limits. Throughout the conference there was often reference to keeping global warming to a limit of 1.77°C. If there is any chance of keeping the original target in sight, together cities must redouble efforts to charge forward and accelerate implementation of climate mitigation strategies, while parallel efforts need to be made on climate adaptation to protect those who are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change (typically the most marginalized members of a community, more broadly the global south, who have contributed the least to this crisis).

Throughout the conference, there were a variety of presentations, ministerial briefings, demonstrations, solutions focused workshops, and discussions on real-world city-level successes and challenges as they relate to implementing climate change mitigation, adaptation and resilience strategies. Subject matter covered included (but was not limited to):

- climate equity and justice
- empowering youth and women and inspiring communities to act
- health impacts from a changing climate
- the just energy transition and market transformation
- electrical grid stabilization, demand side management, and microgrids
- renewable energy generation proliferation
- financing climate action, the cost of adaptation and the risk and financial implications of delayed investment, and
- nature based solutions and assigning a financial value to natural preservation and natural capital

Beyond the presentations delivered by national leaders, it was the presentations and personal interaction with youth, industry, research organizations and city leaders from across the world (and Canada) that leave a lasting impression. These interactions open the door to ongoing learning as we accelerate implementing the City's climate action plans.

Climate Action Mitigation and Adaptation

Through discussions with Mayors and staff from Canada to Europe to Africa, similar challenges and unique approaches were revealed. A selection of discussions are presented below:

- Halifax and Guelph
 - o climate action reserves are instrumental in financing implementation
 - o developing adaptation strategies such as extreme heat response plans
- Yellowknife
 - o evacuating the entire city as wildfires ravaged their community highlights the role of climate change driven emergency management.
- Turku, Finland:
 - o building a city that creates an architecture of choice towards climate friendly outcomes supports reducing community carbon emissions.
 - o On track to be a net zero carbon city by 2029.
- Eswatini:
 - o impacts of drought, extreme heat and floods on local food production, infrastructure and social inequality
 - o the role of public-private partnerships in financing climate resilience, the just energy transition and skilled job creation.

In a panel discussion hosted in the Canadian Pavilion, the National Adaptation Strategy was discussed along with the cost of delayed action. This panel included representation from the federal government, BC provincial government, the CEO of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), the Mayor of Regina, and a leading expert on climate adaptation risk analysis. A key message delivered was the critical value of immediate investment in climate adaptation. The panel highlighted that for every \$1 invested today in climate adaptation, \$13 - \$15 in future benefits can be realized; reducing the cost of loss and damage and enhancing additional economic benefit opportunities¹.

Electrical Grid Infrastructure, Generation and Smart Cities

There was no shortage of discussion on electrical infrastructure, renewable energy, energy storage, and Smart City technologies. There were opportunities to view demonstrations of demand-side management technologies which minimize grid-level electric load without sacrificing individual electrical service. Technology solutions ranged from building level control systems to using artificial intelligence to understand demand patterns, to grid design strategies that minimize losses and incorporate dynamic load management. In three panel discussions, delivered by international experts on grid infrastructure development, energy financing and future grid design, it was conveyed that globally it is necessary to triple the current installed renewable energy capacity, quadruple the amount of transmission lines and increase distribution infrastructure 10 fold. In order to achieve this, it is imperative to get communities on board with clean electrification to ensure there is a clear understanding of the value of the high cost of

¹ Damage Control: Reducing the costs of climate impacts in Canada (https://climateinstitute.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Damage-Control_-EN_0927.pdf)

investment that is needed today in order to safeguard the future. The New Westminster Electric Utility is not alone in the challenge to meet the infrastructure needs of a climate action electrification strategy, and it is also evident that industry is innovating to make sure electric utilities can deliver.

Youth Empowerment

A common thread throughout the conference was the role youth can, and want to play in the climate conversation. Youth empowerment is vital in activating communities and inspiring change. Children born today will be 76 in 2100; this is not a 7th generation crisis, this is a 1st generation crisis. Gen Z will play the most pivotal role in our transformative sustainable future; let's help them start now.

NEXT STEPS

The following actions will be taken by the Climate Action Team (CAT), resulting from conference attendance:

- The Climate Action Workplan will be reviewed to identify ways to augment project delivery, such as increasing opportunities for youth empowerment and creating an architecture of choice that supports climate friendly outcomes.
- The CAT will continue to foster relationships developed to further strengthen the network of climate specialists that the City can draw upon; regionally, provincially, nationally and internationally.
- Ongoing monitoring and review of agreements coming out of COP28 will be conducted to identify potential impacts to the City's climate action strategies.
- Knowledge and learnings will be shared directly with staff within the organization, where relevant, to further integrate a climate lens in the work that is performed across the organization.

CONCLUSION

Attendance at COP28 not only opened up a floodgate of information, connections, technologies, and cultural awareness, but it also unlocked a heightened level of urgency for local governments to lead the conversation. Climate change is real and there are real people who are facing life-or-death consequences. New Westminster is not immune to climate change, and our city is having to adapt to heat stress, rising sea level, atmospheric rivers, poor air quality and respiratory health impacts from nearby forest fires. As the City continues to implement the climate action plans, we are playing our part in a united front, fighting alongside others around the globe to keep 1.5°C in our sights.

INTERDEPARTMENTAL LIAISON

The report was prepared by the Manager of Climate Action, and supports the senior management team in their role as leaders in climate action and champions within their departments.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Attendance at UNCCC was paid for by a third party organization and all local government staff in attendance were provided this same sponsorship. Learnings from the conference will be incorporated into the delivery of climate action initiatives within the identified 2024 capital and operating budgets.

Moving forward, climate action will continue to be embedded in work plans and budgets across all departments. In early 2024 we will bring to council the Climate Action Reserve Fund decision making framework to support allocating funds to further the City's progress towards our climate action goals.

OPTIONS

There are 2 options for Council's consideration:

1. That Council receive this report for information.
2. That Council provide staff with alternative direction.

Staff recommends option 1.

APPROVALS

This report was prepared by:
Leya Behra, P.Eng., Manager, Climate Action

This report was approved by:
Serena Trachta, Acting Director, Climate Action, Planning and Development
Lisa Leblanc, Acting Chief Administrative Officer